Building Sustainable Rural Communities with Smart Growth Approaches

Nuts and Bolts of Redeveloping Brownfields

Kansas City, Missouri

August 29, 2007

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Smart Growth

- Smart Growth is growth that benefits the economy, the community, the environment, and public health.
- Smart growth projects provide consumers with additional market choices for housing, working, shopping, playing, and getting around.
- Smart growth projects include any number of conventional real estate uses arranged in a traditional context such as hamlet, village, town, and city, depending on their location in urban, suburban, or rural areas.

Haile

Mashpee Commons

King Farm

Old Town Wichita

ACHIEVEMENT

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US EPA and Smart Growth

- The EPA's mission is to protect the environment and human health.
- How and where we build have direct and indirect effects on the natural environment and public health.
- Not all development affects the environment or human health in the same ways. As communities examine how to grow, they are looking for strategies that will protect the environment and public health while accommodating new growth.
- Smart growth is promoted as an additional land use and development strategy through the Office of Policy. The EPA's conducts this effort through research and policy development, outreach and education, and technical assistance.
- The EPA is a partner in the Smart Growth Network
- www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/ www.smartgrowth.org

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Current Patterns of Growth: Urban, Suburban, and Rural

- Low density single family housing
- Separate uses
- Disinvestment in Brownfields and older communities
- Conversion of farmland
- Conflict between land used for production and land used for consumption
- Decline of small towns

Environmental Law and Policy Center

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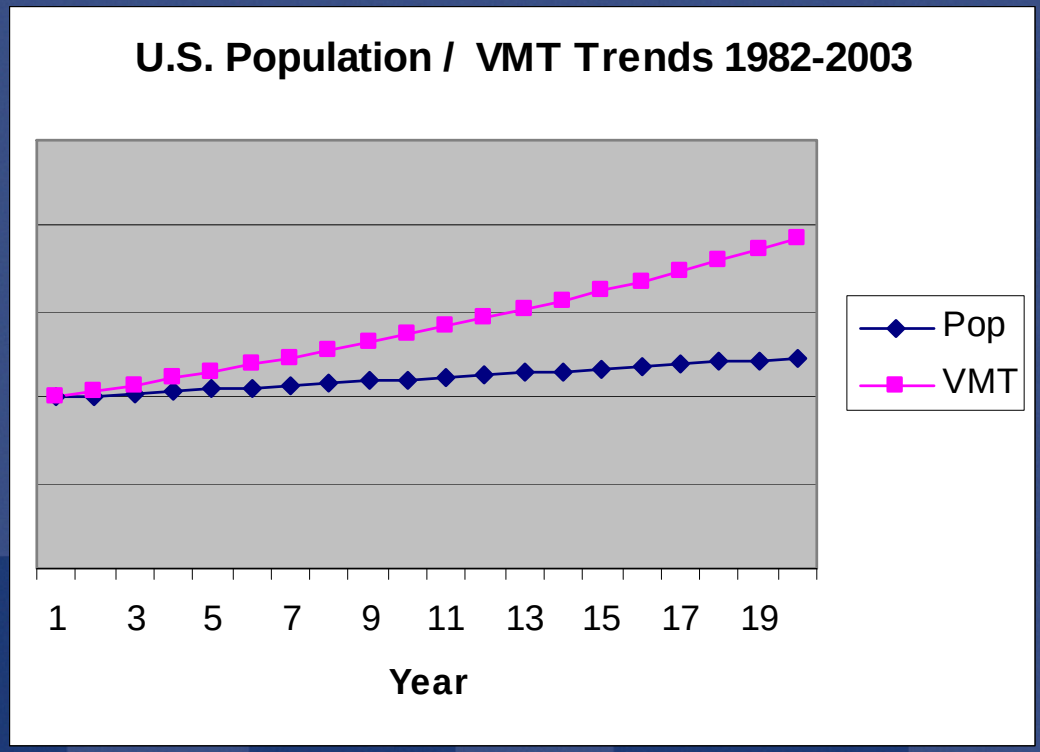
Conventional development pattern: Increasing how much we drive

- Impact of trends:
  - 1.1% annual increase in population 1980-2000
  - 3.5% annual VMT increase 1982-2003



Source: U.S. Census; Texas Transportation Institute

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Environmental Impacts of Conventional Growth Patterns

- Contaminated runoff and impaired water quality
- Growth in vehicle miles traveled (how much we drive) decreases air quality
- Loss of habitat
- Less farmland
- Brownfields abandonment
- Public health

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With Respect to the Environment, Not All Development is Created Equal

- Development with the following attributes has less environmental impact
  - infill development
  - development on previously developed land
  - compact development
  - mixed use
  - variety of transportation options
  - transit-oriented development
  - places with a balance of jobs and housing
  - places with centers (single or multiple)

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Smart Growth Principles

- Mix land uses.
- Take advantage of compact building design.
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices.
- Create walkable neighborhoods.
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas.
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities.
- Provide a variety of transportation choices.
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective.
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

SG Principles adopted by 38 national organizations, 50 units of gov't, 40 NGOs and 13 private sector groups.

Smart Growth Can Protect Water

- Compact Design
- Transportation Alternatives
- Re-use of Brownfields
- Investing in/maintaining Existing Communities
- Preservation of Key Open Space and Critical Environmental Areas

Image: Victor Dover

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Smart growth and brownfields redevelopment connections: Challenges and opportunities exist

- Smart growth principles help frame the argument for better brownfield redevelopment
  - Region, neighborhood, site…
  - Environmental, economic, community, and public health benefits are compounded
- Smart growth strategies help frame the solutions for overcoming barriers to better redevelopment
  - Code and ordinance reform
  - Community visioning
  - Districts to solve infrastructure and parking challenges



Redevelopment Readiness Certification

michigan suburbs alliance

2006 best practices and scoring system

redevelopment ready communities℠

- Help older communities evolve their development processes to be open, clear, and predictable
- Encourage consistent redevelopment planning that incorporates public opinion.
- Push cities to pre-vision specific redevelopment sites
- Attract new development opportunities in the highly competitive investment environment
- Reduce time and cost barriers to redevelopment projects to potential investors
- Change developer perception that redevelopment *has* to be difficult or complex
- Method: **Best Practices and Scoring System**

Land of Sky Regional Council

Brownfield redevelopment central to regional smart growth strategy in Land of Sky Region *(Asheville, NC)

What are the challenges to redevelopment? Let's ask developers.

Findings

- Lack of proactive planning and strategic investments that support redevelopment.
- Inflexible zoning and unpredictable, time consuming rezoning and development review process
- Land assembly
- Inconsistent, inefficient and lengthy approval and permitting processes were also identified as barriers,
- Smaller towns can be more flexible and nimble and respond to development opportunities
- Contamination and clean-up costs not a big barrier

Lessons from the SG brownfields work

- Challenges and opportunities exist
  - Barriers to better redevelopment
  - Numerous solutions are being used
- Reforming codes and policies, community visioning, leadership, identification of barriers, and cooperation among stakeholders are all solutions
- Asking stakeholders what they need seems to be a pretty good place to start
- Lessons learned need to be shared

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Smart growth strategies improve fiscal outcomes

- Brookings Institute: More compact development patterns promise savings for governments nationwide:
  - 11 percent, or $110 billion, from 25-year road building costs
  - 6 percent, or $12.6 billion, from 25-year water and sewer costs;
  - and roughly 3 percent, or $4 billion, for annual operations and service delivery.

Muro, Peuntes. Investing in A Better Future. Brookings Institute. March 2004.

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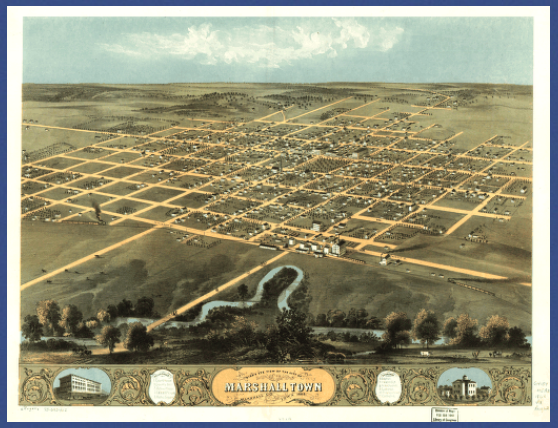
Historic rural form: determined by economic necessity and transportation technology

- Small towns in rural areas served the agriculture economy
- Were mixed use, compact, walkable **and** many had regional transportation (RR or river transport)
- Form varied by region



Marshall Town, IA

Kingman, KS

Source: Library of Congress, American Memory Collection; US EPA

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Changing rural America

- Economy, culture, transportation has changed
- If historical rural had some homogeneity, that's clearly changed;
- Proximity to metro areas defines what's going on in rural America as much as anything today…
- 1/3 of rural counties are declining; 2/3 are growing
- … And what else?
  - The need for economic diversity
  - The need for expanded choices in where to live, how to get around, where to work

Old rural economy?

Images: US EPA

Part of the new rural economy?

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Source: B. Winchester, Center for Small Towns; US Census

Environmental Protection Agency

Rural land is being converted at an alarming rate

- 1982 – 2001 34 million acres of open space converted to developed land
- 1982 to 1997 10 million acres of forest land converted to developed land
- 2030 projections – additional 26 million acres to be developed
- How and where this development takes place will profoundly impact the environment

Image Source: US EPA

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Active living, public health, and rural America: some trends

- Higher rates of obesity in rural America
- Rural children and adolescent obesity rates outpace national rates
- Rural children: less likely to walk to school and have longer bus rides
- Land development pattern in rural America is becoming more suburban: single use, fragmented, automobile reliant
- Public health researchers correlate decline in walkable communities with increase in obesity levels
- Not all about the development pattern – change and decline in the agriculture economy plays a role as well.

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Sources: Jackson & Kochtitzky, *Creating a Healthy Environment*; *Health United States, 2005*; Patterson, Moore, Probst, Shinogle, Obesity and physical activity in rural America, *J Rural Health,* 2004; Tai-Seale, Chandler, in *Rural Healthy People,* 2003; Howley, Howley, & Shamblen, *The experience or rural school bus rides*, 2001.

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Strategies for better growth in small towns and rural areas:

1. **Help existing places to thrive.**
2. **Create great new places.**
3. **Keep the things the people say they like about rural life.**

Images: US EPA

To help existing towns thrive, communities have:

- Reduced barriers to infill and brownfield redevelopment.
- Updated zoning ordinances and development codes to support traditional mixed use development.
- Adopted “fix-it-first” policies, such as rehabilitating existing schools rather than building new schools outside of the existing community.

Image Source: US EPA

EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

Helping existing places thrive:
Main Street Programs

Mississippi Main Street. Est. 1989

- Includes programs for communities with population less than 5,000.
  - Program has generated
    - $1.5 billion in investment
    - 2,900 new businesses
    - 18,500 new jobs
  - Each MS State dollar invested leveraged:
    - $376 private reinvestment
    - $62 in public/local reinvestment
    - $438 combined

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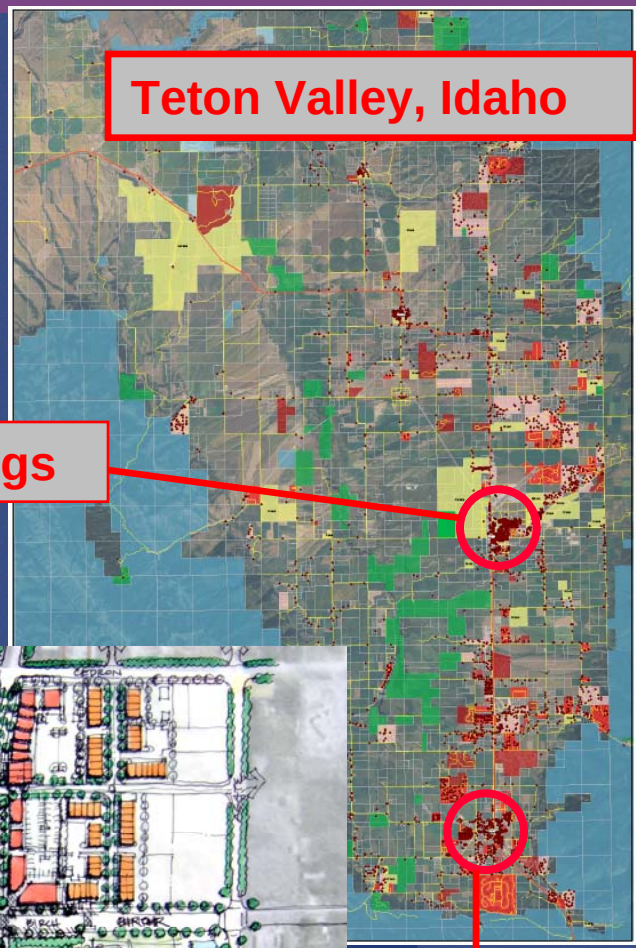
The cities of Victor and Driggs, Idaho

- Rapidly growing cities in Teton Valley, Idaho (pop. ~1300 each)
- Accommodate growth in the cities:
  - Articulate the vision: community wants a thriving, revitalized downtown and development that respects the land
  - Revise policies and codes to allow for compact, mixed-use development
  - Strategic public investment



Downtown Victor Concept

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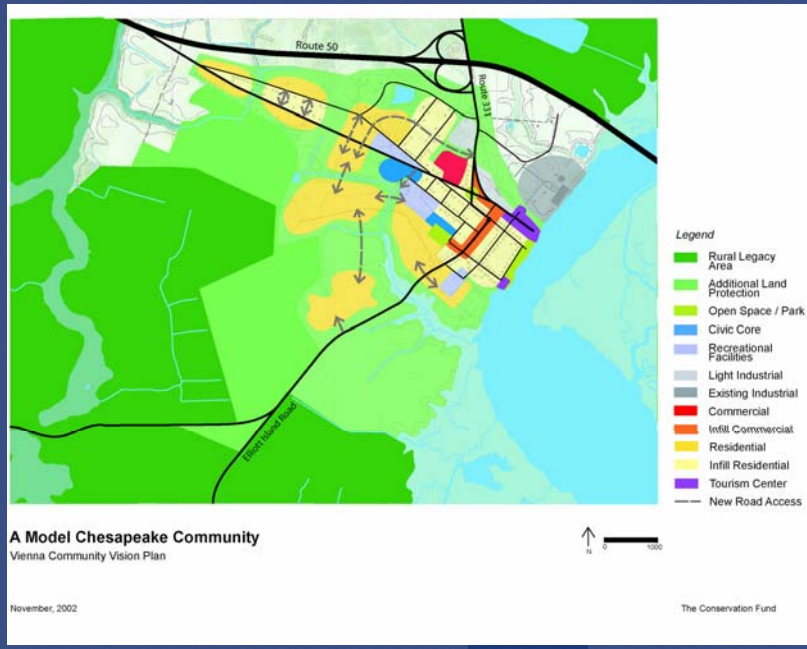
To promote the development of great new places, communities have:

- Created comprehensive plans that call for the development of traditional villages and hamlets in appropriate places *and* aligned the underlying zoning with these plans.
- Recognized developers that build great places.
- Where possible, accommodated growth through the expansion of the historic grid so new neighborhoods are integrated into the existing town.



Vienna, MD: Model Chesapeake Community

Image Source: Vienna, MD

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To keep the things people say they like about rural life, communities have:

- Supported the resource economy in the region: promoting CSA and farmers markets; local products, and direct sales.

- Cultivated economic development strategies supportive of the traditional rural landscape; used conservation easements, purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, and tax policy to protect the land.

- Worked with land trusts to strategically purchase threatened and endangered properties and/or development rights.

Image: USDA

Image: US EPA

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Photo courtesy of Jeff Speck, NEA

Smart growth in a rural community: How could it work in the landscape?

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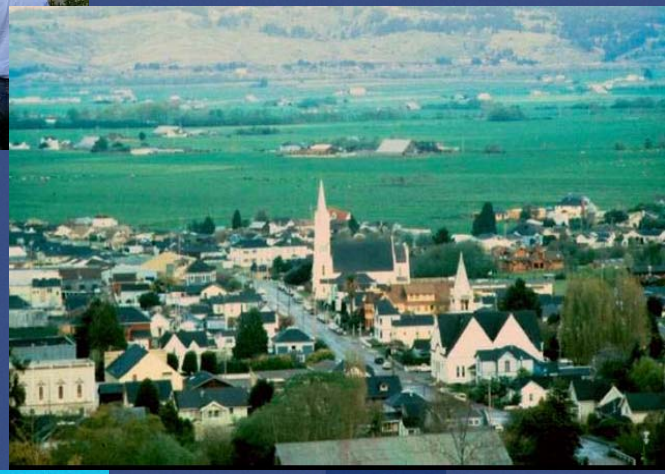
Some of the benefits of a smart growth rural development pattern

- Walkable communities and active living
- Efficient use of economic resources: grow previous investments
- Environmental benefits: air, land, water
- Community benefits: third places, strong communities
- More choices in how to get around, where to live, work, and play



Images: Victor Dover

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AND…

Market demand for Smart Growth is here

- **Consumer surveys show about one-third of the home buying market wants the smart growth product**
  - Academic research (Dowell Meyers. 2001)
  - Homebuilder surveys (NAHB. 2002)
  - Smart growth studies (SGA/NAR. 2004)
  - Regional/Metropolitan organizations preference surveys (SMARTRAQ (Atlanta). 2006.)
  - Private sector reports (Robert Charles Lesser & Co. Compiled 2007)

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Source: EPA White Paper: The Market for Smart Growth. Gregg Logan, Robert Charles Lesser & Co. 2007.

The opportunity is now

- About 1.8 million new houses built each year (2006)
- About a third of today's homebuyers want a smart growth product
- Smart growth represents between 2% and 5% of annual new housing starts
- Supply gap of about 510,000 smart growth houses annually
- Demand likely to grow based on demographic changes, household makeup and housing preference trends

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Future US growth and the smart growth opportunity for the private sector

- 100 million new Americans by 2037
- Past construction patterns and product lifecycles indicate that by 2030:
  - 34 million new housing units (35% more than today)
  - 78 billion sf of non-residential space (90% of existing 2005)
  - Consumer preference surveys show demand for smart growth product is approximately one-third

Source: EPA White Paper: Where Will Everybody Live? Arthur C. “Chris” Nelson, Virginia Tech. 2007.

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Moving forward: Most certainly challenges but also opportunities

- Growing small towns and rural places using smart growth principles
  - How and where growth occurs – uses and the form of the buildings – on the ground is what matters
  - New growth should reflect your community's vision
- Strategies:
  - Visioning
  - Policies: Do you have the policies in place that allow for the type of development your community wants?
  - Infrastructure investments
- An economic opportunity? Many folks already have strong attachments to small towns

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Some final thoughts to consider

- The smart growth development pattern is the rural development pattern;
- Align goals across public agencies: health/active living, development policies, economic development, public works, transportation, schools;
- Put forward a vision;
- Collaborate on getting development policies and codes right;
- Ensure public investments help achieve the goals communities say they want;
- Collaborate with private sector to meet the coming demand.

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Thank you

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